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Libya: Fears for detainees held by anti-Gaddafi forces

People suspected of having fought for Colonel Mu'ammr al-Gaddafi, in particular black Libyans and sub-Saharan Africans, are increasingly at risk of abuse by anti-Gaddafi forces, Amnesty International said today after witnessing black Libyans being targeted in Tripoli on Monday.

An Amnesty International delegation visiting the Central Tripoli Hospital witnessed three *thuwwar* revolutionaries, as the opposition fighters are commonly known, dragging a black patient from the western town of Tawargha from his bed and detaining him. The men were in civilian clothing.

The *thuwwar* said the man would be taken to Misratah for questioning, arguing that interrogators in Tripoli “let killers free”.

Two other black Libyans receiving treatment in the hospital for gunshot wounds were warned by the anti-Gaddafi forces that “their turn was coming”.

The delegation also witnessed a group of *thuwwar* beating a man outside the hospital. The man, in distress, was shouting “I am not a fifth columnist”, as al-Gaddafi loyalists are known.

“Within an hour, Amnesty International witnessed one man being hit and one dragged out of his hospital bed to an unknown fate,” said Claudio Cordone, Senior Director at Amnesty International.

“We have to fear for what may be happening to detainees out of the sight of independent observers”, he added.

In May, the NTC issued guidelines for its forces to act in accordance with international law and standards. In another move, the NTC has in recent days messaged Libyan mobile phone users urging its supporters to treat captives with dignity and to avoid revenge attacks.

“We welcome these initiatives by the NTC. But the council must do more to ensure that their fighters do not abuse detainees, especially the most vulnerable ones such as black Libyans and Sub-Saharan Africans” said Claudio Cordone.

“Fighters engaging in abuses should be immediately removed from active duty, pending investigation,” he added.

“All crimes, no matter who committed them, should be investigated and those responsible brought to justice, he added.

The *thuwwar* fighters told Amnesty International that they were taking the Tawargha patient from the hospital as they were unhappy that the hospital staff were about to discharge a man they believed was loyal to Colonel Mu'ammr al-Gaddafi.

Tawargha is home to many ethnically black Libyans. In the mind of Misratah residents, the town is associated with the worst violations committed during the month-long siege and relentless shelling of Misratah earlier this year.

The doctor on duty authorized the “arrest” and the patient was eventually taken away, despite Amnesty International’s protests.

Sub-Saharan Africans are particularly vulnerable to abuses. Many risk reprisals as a result of allegations that al-Gaddafi forces used “African mercenaries” to commit widespread violations during the conflict.

In recent visits to detention centres in al-Zawiya and Tripoli today, Amnesty International was told that between one third and half of those detained were from Sub-Saharan Africa.

On 29 August, Amnesty International examined the body of an unidentified black man at the Tripoli Medical Centre morgue. He was brought into the morgue earlier that morning by unknown men.

His feet and his torso were tied. He bore no visible injuries, but had blood smudged around his mouth. The state of his body pointed to a recent death. No autopsy report was available, and no identification documents were found on him.

On 28 August, Amnesty International visited a group of Eritreans hiding in their home in a poor Tripoli neighbourhood.

They told the organization that they were staying indoors for fear of violent attacks. Their situation was particularly dire given the absence of electricity and running water.